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Soviet Spy Gets New Lease on U.N. Job

After pressure from the Soviet Union, U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim has extended the employment of an assistant who is described in secret U.S. intelligence reports as the KGB's top espionage agent in the United Nations.

The KGB man is Viktor Lesiovsky, who was scheduled for retirement Jan. 4 from his post as a special assistant to Waldheim. The Soviets wanted to keep their secret police's spy in this sensitive spot, and the Americans wanted him extricated.

Caught in the middle was the harried Waldheim, who needs both American and Russian acquiescence if he is to continue in his job for a third five-year term. He compromised by giving Lesiovsky another six months, instead of the year the Soviets demanded.

The pressure play behind Waldheim's decision was unprecedented in U.N. history — for the simple reason that it was the first time the KGB had infiltrated the U.N. administration at such a high level.

Members of the U.N. staff are supposed to maintain their primary loyalty to the international body, not to their spy organization. While no one seriously believed the Soviet employees took this requirement seriously, Lesiovsky's case was more flagrant than others.

In 1978, Lesiovsky was identified as a KGB agent by Arkady Shevchenko,

the top-ranking Soviet known to have defected to the West. A highly classified CIA report reviewed by my associate Dale Van Atta details Lesiovsky's strange U.N. career.

The report describes Lesiovsky as "a sophisticated Soviet official who has had tours in Burma, Thailand and Australia, and came to the United States in 1961." In Asia, Lesiovsky became close to the late U.N. Secretary General U Thant — an "in" that apparently got him his U.N. job. Lesiovsky was and is, the CIA report states bluntly, "a senior KGB official."

More sociable than most Soviet diplomats, Lesiovsky speaks "fluent English with an American accent," the CIA reported. When Shevchenko defected in April 1978, the Russians began pressuring Waldheim to move Lesiovsky up to the prestigious position of assistant secretary general. This would have given him access to far more information — and influence — than he possessed as a mere "special assistant" to Waldheim.

Lesiovsky apparently complained to a colleague that Waldheim had reneged on a promise to promote him, and added the startling prediction that if the promotion never did materialize, Lesiovsky "hopes to accept an offer from the Smithsonian Institution ... for a two-year research contract."

How this alleged offer occurred, the CIA did not explain, but the agency was clearly alarmed: "Should this [ap-

pointment] materialize, it would give the KGB access to an important medium for reaching sophisticated American influence-builders," the CIA noted.

As it turned out, Lesiovsky didn't get to be Waldheim's assistant secretary, and no one in the Smithsonian's far-flung branches has any record of an offer being made to the KGB's man at the United Nations. Lesiovsky may have been deliberately planting false information for Byzantine reasons of his own.

Instead of letting the unmasked KGB agent go Jan. 4, Waldheim gave him a six-month extension on grounds that Lesiovsky's successor won't arrive in New York for several months.

So the Kremlin spy in the United Nations was given more time to create mischief.